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Intern of the Week: History is a thrill, intern proclaims

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For 21-year-old Maggie Taylor, from Framingham, Mass., there is nothing boring about history or interning in the Office of the Historian.

During one of her first weeks, sequestered in the basement of the Cannon House Office Building, she and her colleagues heard a disturbance down the hall. When they went to investigate, they found a group of Puerto Rican nationalists chanting, waving flags and being diverted downstairs by Capitol security.

“They were rallying, and they were all getting arrested,” Taylor said. “We quickly retreated because we were scared we were going to get, like, pepper-sprayed.”

Taylor is a history and political science major at the University of Vermont. This semester, she is studying at American University and interning in the House historian’s office. The office tackles a variety of questions from lawmakers, reporters and the public about the history of Congress — everything from “Which office did John F. Kennedy use?” to “Is the Capitol really haunted?” (Taylor said they have no proof that it’s haunted, but the building was used as a hospital during the Civil War, and some swear they have seen apparitions of Union soldiers.)

Taylor gets excited about perusing photography archives and accessing records kept at the Library of Congress, the world’s largest library.

“I was just astounded by how much access there is,” she said. “It’s kind of overwhelming how many resources there are. ... Any book that I could ever want I can just order, and then it’ll come to the office either later that day or the next week.”

To illustrate the sincerity and longevity of her love affair with history, Taylor said she has even named her pets after historical figures just for the nerdy fun of it. For example, she named her betta fish Samuel Gompers, after the American labor leader of Industrial Revolution fame.

When people asked her about the betta fish's name, Taylor's response sometimes generated caustic comments. "I'd say, 'Samuel Gompers was a labor leader,' and they'd say, like, 'Whoa, you're a dork.'"

Taylor sees her internship as the perfect fusion of her two passions, history and politics. And her basement office has not completely barred her from exposure to lawmakers. She recently met her congressman, Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.), who was happy to talk but was summoned for a vote, so he invited her to walk with him. They walked and talked, then boarded a members-only elevator.

"And then all of a sudden this flood of members came in," said Taylor, who thought, "Oh my goodness. I shouldn't be in here."

"Sometimes I feel like a groupie among famous people," she said.